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The Latest Update on Teacher Negotiations

Vidula Mannem
Ellen Wang
Ria Vasishtha
Editors-in-Chief

Ten months into the process, teacher contract negotiations are still ongoing at Lexington Public Schools. LPS faculty and administration are working in conjunction to settle on a contract that fairly compensates educators and addresses their needs.

"I'm on the bargaining team. I've been at that table since March. If we look at neighboring districts that have settled contracts in the last year, they're getting things like paid parental leave, larger cost of living adjustments, and higher pay scales," Dana Silverberg, a psychologist at Clarke Middle School, said. "We see our value and see the things that we deserve and we see other districts getting that, so we are willing to hold out to get that."

Members of the community, apart from teachers, have become increasingly aware of the teacher negotiations process.

"We as students see that our teachers are affected everyday, teachers are often out grading or they need to give things back really late because they have too many classes, and are running around to three different classrooms. This directly affects us so we need to care," Gabriel Savir, a senior at Lexington High School, said.

Many have taken the initiative to support their teachers in advocating for a fair contract.

"There are a lot of actions that [students] can take that are pretty simple. For example, wearing red on Tuesdays is a pretty well-known thing you can do, and a lot of students do participate in this or try to, which is fantastic. There are also standouts," Savir said.

Teachers have also noticed a change in student learning spanning across all grades levels including in elementary schools.

"There has been a lot of talk about taking [Elementary Friday half-days] away. We lose that collaboration time, which is also collaboration time with other schools and also planning time. We have to get things set up for students throughout the week," Michael Plamondon, a second grade teacher at Bridge Elementary School, said

If, during negotiations, the two parties cannot reach an agreement, it's possible that a neutral third party will enter to mediate. This has happened in other school districts and with other local unions. Neither the LEA nor the LPS district team are interested in that outcome. Educators believe this step is not ideal as it minimizes the opportunity to compromise on complex issues.

"After the contract, we're going to need to continue working together. The mediator isn't going to stay on. We need to know how to have these productive conversations and it is well within both sides' ability to be able to find that place and be able to listen and be empathetic and compromise," Silverberg said. "Bringing in someone that hasn't been at that table since March is going to be a big step back."

At this point, both sides continue to negotiate in good faith and hope to reach a resolution without mediation.

Steven Feifke '09 Awarded Grammy

William Tang
Felix Cao
Staff Writers

Steven Feifke, an Assistant Professor at the Berklee College of Music and Lexington High School alumnus, was awarded the 2023 Best Jazz Large Ensemble Grammy Award for leading the Generation Gap Jazz Orchestra ensemble alongside trumpeter Bijon Watson, a Boston native. Feifke is the youngest band leader to ever receive the award

As the son of a pianist, Feifke's journey with music began at the age of four, when he first started learning the piano. However, Feifke soon grew curious about improvisation and musical composition.

"When I was around ten years old, I asked if I could learn a different type of music that let me compose on the spot. My piano teacher at the time really helped me find what I was looking for: jazz," Feifke said.

Jared Cassedy, Lexington Public Schools' performing arts coordinator, believes the award is a well-deserved tribute to Feifke's work and achievements.

"Feifke's Grammy win is not only a testament to him, but also his work ethic, the kind of programming and education he has received, and the mentors and experiences he has had along the way that have helped bring him to where he is today," Cassedy said.

Indeed, Feifke cites LHS's jazz program as central to his development as a musician.

"LHS has a fantastical jazz program. I worked closely with Jeff Leonard, the head of jazz at the time, and Justin Aramati back when I was freshman. They are fantastic musicians as well as fantastic educators," Feifke said.

The Generation Gap Jazz Orchestra is an ensemble that works to showcase and celebrate generational diversity through music.

"It is composed not only of people in my generation but also Watson's generation. There are even people that are younger than both of us," Feifke said.

More importantly, however, Feifke describes jazz as a vehicle for creativity, allowing him to express his ideas and share them with the world.

"I love writing music, playing music, and conducting to music. Those are the three means of communication I use the most… The music is written in such a way where everyone is creating a vision together, a communal expression. That is music. It is a communal expression," Feifke said.

Steven Feifke (right) standing with Mr. Aramati (left) and Mr. Donaher (middle)
Photo Provided by Susan Offsey

Dealing with Parental Pressure

■ Joy Yuan
Columnist

Lexington is a town rife with overachievers. While some competition can be healthy, an excess amount often leads to a decline in a student's mental well-being. The school board has tried resolving this issue through providing more mental health support, limiting underclassmen from taking certain Advanced Placement (AP) courses, preventing students from skipping course levels, etc. However, when we examine the root cause of this competitive environment, we often find that it stems from another source: the student's parents.

I spoke to some of my friends and peers about this topic, and there seems to be a trend of students signing up for rigorous courses just for parental validation. Many students' view on their academic career is heavily influenced by their parents, resulting in a community where harsh competition is normalized and even encouraged.

Parental pressure isn't uncommon. Many families move to Lexington in hopes of their children having academic success. As a first-generation immigrant, my family moved through several cities and countries and finally decided on Lexington, so they certainly had high expectations for my academic performance. While that in itself isn't toxic, there is a fine line between having expectations and demanding excellence.

In Lexington, it's more common for parents to indirectly pressure their children rather than merely having high expectations. Indirect pressure can come in the form of verbal degradation, guilt-tripping, or gaslighting. For example, have your parents ever told you "you can do better than this" or "you're just overreacting"? Subtle comments like these put students in a negative mindset about themselves. In the end, students may choose their parents' decisions over their own in hopes of not receiving such degrading comments. Otherwise, they may act according to their parents' expectations, and in doing so, they may face academic struggle, toxic social interactions, and even burnout.

Ultimately it's important for students to be able to manage these issues. The first and most obvious answer is to communicate with your parents more. Most of the time, your parents are on your side and play a crucial part in your support system. While it's important that you put an end to toxic pressure from your parents, acting rebellious towards your parents won't help. When I was a middle schooler, I refused to communicate with my parents about my viewpoint. This led our relationship to worsen, and losing support from the people who are closest to you can definitely take a toll on your mental health.

Unfortunately, it's not easy to compromise with your parents, and sometimes it is necessary to consult a third party. A trusted adult, a teacher or counselor or your close friends can all be part of your support system. However, it's important to choose your support system carefully. For example, an older relative may be biased towards your parent's mindset, while a friend might not have the experience to be capable of giving you helpful advice.

In the end, parental pressure has been and still is very evident in our community today. By increasing healthy communication with our parents, we can all lessen the pressure in our community and improve our relationship with ourselves and our parents.

Talia's Thoughts: The Honors for All Initiative

■ Talia Alperin
Columnist

When "Honors for All" was first introduced, a program to unlevel 10th and 11th English Language Arts (ELA) classes, it was all that anyone talked about.

Between this program and the middle schools unlevelling Math and World Languages, many began to wonder why these changes were occuring. Should such changes be run by the wider community first? Will they be effective, or will they, as some fear, lower the standard of education at Lexington High School?

One idea behind "Honors for All" is that unleveling the ELA curriculum will address racial and learning disparities in honors enrollment. The "Honors for All" Committee was concerned that some students are underrepresented in AP and Honors classes and overrepresented in CP2 courses. The system also favors wealthier students, who have access to academic support outside of school. When students face barriers to honors classes, they are less prepared for college, if that is their goal. These disparities must be eliminated if we are to fight systemic injustice and inequality. I am supportive of the "Honors for All" goal of having everyone participate in rigorous, honors-level English classes. However, some are concerned that the implementation of "Honors for All" may have unexpected effects.

The "Honors for All" committee emphasized that the honors English curriculum would be unchanged, saying that teachers would help students adapt to an honors-level curriculum using Universal Design Learning (UDL). Nevertheless, many of us are still concerned that the "Honors for All" ELA curriculum will not truly be at the honors level in order to support all ability levels.

Unlevelling curricula cannot be successful if we only start at the high school level. Rigorous education needs to start in elementary and middle schools, and sufficient support structures need to be put in place early on for students of all ability levels. Only then can all students thrive in a course that is truly honors-level.

To unlevel the curriculum of any subject, it is essential to raise the curriculum standards for elementary and middle school students. This is especially important in departments such as math, science and history, where the difference between CP and honors/AP classes is astronomical. When I jumped from seventh grade regular math to eighth grade honors math, I felt as if I was thrown into the deep end. The disparity between standard-level and honors-level courses increases even more in high school, where students' packed schedules prevent them from having the support they need.

Overall, I understand the reasoning behind the "Honors for All" English program and I support it in principle. There have been cases where unleveling has demonstrated clear benefits for students. I simply have concerns about how the "Honors for All" program is being implemented, specifically at LHS. When the school community was notified of the changes happening in the English department, these plans had already been in place for a few years.

Transparency and communication ensures that changes are well-considered and appropriately challenged. I am disappointed that LPS is making these changes before discussing it with the greater Lexington community. Moving forward, the school administration should consider announcing such plans earlier on in the process, to ensure that there is a rigorous level of discussion with the community before implementing changes that have a major impact on students.

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Should LHS Have More Course Offerings?

Avni Rathi
Maya Bhandarkar
Staff Writers

At Lexington High School, many students yearn for new classes that enhance their academic journey and provide a more enjoyable learning environment. Thus, LHS should prioritize implementing a wider range of classes, especially within the English and Science departments. Many teachers and students have already proposed interesting ideas that would benefit both teachers and students.

Within the English department, teachers have created several course options for seniors, from Women's Literature to Film and Society. Abigail Chaffer, an English teacher, has ideas for expanding English Electives for other grades.

"It would be fun to do semesters of different electives or a different approach. I'd love some kind of nonfiction based elective. I'd love detective fiction or subgenres," Chaffer said.

The course offerings would appeal to students who have interests in those areas. Allowing that to happen would increase course diversity at LHS and allow students to explore a wider array of options.

LHS should also implement Advanced Placement (AP) Language and AP Literature classes. It would give students who are very interested in English a chance to challenge themselves in an AP class.

However, some teachers would prefer to focus less on offering AP classes as a solution to increasing course diversity.

"I think all it does is heighten competition. It focuses folks on college and credits rather than what they're doing at the time. And nothing holds you back from taking an AP test without taking an AP course," Chaffer said.

Chaffer elaborated on the negative impact adding AP English classes could have on the development of the LHS curriculum.

"One thing about AP curriculum is that it's really prescriptive and that it gives you exactly what points you have to cover or what books need to be read. And one thing that I am proud of, is that we take a lot of ownership and pride in designing a curriculum that meets the needs of our students here and meets the interests and populations that we teach" Chaffer said.

LHS should continue to diversify the school curriculum with new course offerings. A recently added course, Journeys in East Asian Literature, improved representation by highlighting East Asian history and culture. However, LHS should give equal recognition to other Asian histories, such as South Asian and Pacific Island narratives. More thoughtful and thorough representation is crucial to cultivating a school community where everyone can find a place to share their voice.

The science department should also consider adding new electives. The department already offers niche electives including Astronomy and an Introduction to Robotics and Engineering. However, the department can explore other facets of the science field, like anatomy and physiology or cooking classes.

Jonathan Ng, a Environmental Earth Science teacher, supports implementing the new courses, but recognizes potential barriers.

"There are a lot of rules, regulations, budgets, requirements, and restrictions that the school needs to follow. [There are] currently 2300 students in a school designed for 815. The lack of space is very restrictive," Ng said.

That being said, LHS implementing new classes would have a lot of benefits for the community. These classes could provide students with new opportunities and endless possibilities of what they could achieve throughout their high school and future career.

The Pandemic's Lasting Effects on Students

Yiling Sha
Ethan Shao

The Associated Press has researched and reported a recent increase in disruptive student behavior, which has been observed among Lexington High School students.

A 9th-grade English teacher, Caroline Fantasia, agreed with the Associated Press' findings.

"There are a little bit more physical interactions, like people kind of shoving and things like that," Fantasia said. "It's not necessarily done with ill intent, in a lot of ways, but just a little bit less awareness of how we control our bodies in a school environment," Fantasia said.

In fact, she said that the quality of student work has mostly stayed the same compared to previous years.

However, she has witnessed one notable physical interaction between students.

"This year, for the very first time, I had to intervene between two kids who might have been escalating towards a fight," Fantasia said. "But I will say that I felt like everyone involved handled the incident well."

Andrew Porter, an Instructional Assistant who assists classes in multiple grades, has not seen a drastic difference, but rather a gradual change.

"I have not noticed it myself since I've been in perhaps calmer sections. But over time, I have seen less ingrained self-control in certain students," Porter said. "I have heard some other teachers talking about a couple of unruly or disruptive sections that they have, which is somewhat new this year."

This change in student behavior correlates with students' prolonged isolation during the pandemic. The Associated Press writes, "instances of misbehavior have increased since students returned to classrooms from the COVID-19 pandemic."

Fantasia agrees that isolation during the pandemic has negatively affected schools.

"I think because people were out of the classrooms, and missed so much time learning within the building, that it sort of affected growth and maturity," she said.

Online learning likely affected students' ability to focus as well. Many students were distracted during Zoom classes, spending their class time scrolling social media or playing video games. This habit of continuous distraction has carried into the classroom, where students are more unfocused and may cause disruptions during class.

"Everything takes practice, so focus is something that needs to be practiced and strengthened," said Fantasia. "I absolutely see it in the classroom with students struggling to stay in their seats for the entire time and maintain focus for the full hour," Fantasia said.

Fantasia, and Porter agree that a sense of maturity correlates with proper high school behavior.

"I can think of several students over the past few years who were kind of disruptive in freshman year and maybe at the beginning of sophomore year. But really just because of their maturity, they started dropping some of their behaviors," Porter said.

Middle school is a transitional period in which students mature into high school. This situation has led to a new set of objectives for Fantasia, who changed her teaching style to reflect a new set of students with a unique set of challenges.

"It's kind of like 'Okay, what can we do to help these students adjust to this type of structure?'" she said. The answer seems to lie in reinforcing the "expectation that 'Okay when I'm in class I have to be focused," Fantasia emphasizes.

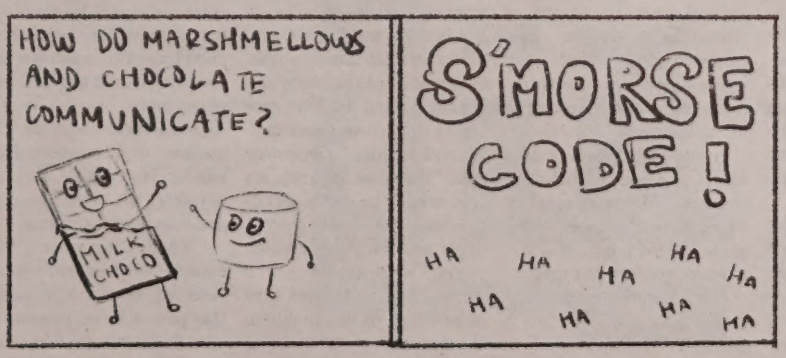
However, some believe otherwise. Porter describes a different theory in addition to the pandemic.

"I think there has been an adjustment to self-regulation after the pandemic, and some catch-up on skills. But I think some underlying problems that I would categorize as de-regulation are as much a cause as the pandemic," Porter said.

Porter has seen success in helping students mature through more personal teacher-student interactions.

"One-on-one with a student [reminds] them of the environment they are in and what expectations go along with it," Porter said. "Earlier this year, I took a student out into the hall and just had a chat with them. I told them what I saw, reminded them of what they need to do, and asked them if they could do it, and this personal connection worked well."

Srija Ghosh
Cartoonist



Building Bridges: LHS's Special Education Program

■ Jahnavi Bolleddula
Angela Shi

Erzsebet Bognar, an instructional assistant at Lexington High School, left Budapest, Hungary with her family to save the eyesight of her daughter Lily, who was born prematurely and is visually impaired. Since then, Lily has become a source of inspiration for Bognar, teaching her about patience, and ultimately influencing her to pursue a career in special education.

Bognar expresses delight at the prospect of establishing close relationships with her students and understanding the abilities of the students she works with.

"I can be so close to the kids, one-on-one. I love the diversity: diversity of ethnicity, diversity of the way of thinking, that we all have different ways to get things done. We all discuss our own narrow diversity, but we should recognize that all of us have something to contribute, since we all can learn the same material differently," Bognar said.

Allison Bradley, a staff member in the special education department, became interested in pursuing this career when she worked with a speech pathologist in her senior year of high school. Through her mentor, she gained a greater understanding of the field of speech and ultimately decided that she wanted to pursue it further in college.

"I love being able to target functional skills with students, so that involves things like cooking or practicing doing laundry," Bradley said.

However, many challenges and complexities also come with working in the special education department. In some extreme cases, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) may be brought up in court to ensure the child is getting what they need and come with many tedious legal procedures.

"I definitely think time is the biggest challenge, and then IEPs. Those are legal documents, so there are a lot of procedures you have to follow, a lot of paperwork you have to fill out, and a lot of documents that have to be completed," Bradley said.

In addition, making connections with the students can be a difficult and slow process - something that takes time and experience to master.

"You have to learn the way of how to get friendly with someone you want to help in a friendly way and a comfortable way, and you do not want to make the student feel that they are different," Bognar said.

While LHS offers various programs in the Special Education Department, members of the community look positively towards improvements. In future years, they hope to bring more students from special education into general classrooms and increase the variety of electives they can take.

"Bringing in other [kids with special needs] into the classroom will benefit everyone because instead of us having to deal with them later on in life, we can learn those skills now instead of later," Dominic Rosario, a freshman in special education, said.

The Lexington community can also support the special education department by having an open mindset when encountering those with a disability.

"When people without a disability encounter someone with a pretty obvious disability, it can be intimidating for them…have patience, keep an open mind, and acknowledge their peers with disabilities as other teenagers who are also experiencing high school," Bradley said.

African American History Month Display Case in the Library

■ Taili Gao
Staff Writer

In honor of Black History Month, which is celebrated in February across the United States, Lexington High School's library display case was filled with creative designs. Created by students in LHS's African Literature course, the display case emphasized the importance of resistance in Black-American history.

The students used music, such as curated Spotify playlists, to convey the history and stories of African Americans. It was a way of celebrating diverse cultures and recognizing Black History Month.

"If we get students involved, there's more ownership and awareness that is spread. It was cool to see my students when they were researching, listening to Nina Simone, or looking through an artist's paintings or watching some dance that they haven't seen. And realizing that there's so many Black women who have invented things that we depend on," Robin Strizhak, a teacher of the African American Literature class, said.

The students incorporated art and media to highlight the stories of marginalized groups and explore creative ways to educate viewers on Black resistance.

"I loved what [the students] did because they just thought about different things. A couple of students created playlists, and then made a QR code that linked to the playlist. People did all sorts of things and took it in their own direction," Carin Casey, a librarian at LHS, said.

This project started with a conversation in the African American Literature class on the meaning of Black resistance after watching movies and reading books, including The Color Purple by Alice Walker. They discussed Black power, protests, and Black joy as resistance. The collaboration between the library and the African American Literature class provided students with a chance to share their views and engage personally with their creations.

"We really wanted to give this opportunity to [students] to express their perspectives. I think it's hard because students are not typically asked to do that," Strizhak said.

Plans for the new class, which focuses on studying America from a unique point of view, began during the pandemic. The display case featuring Black resistance for Black History Month advocates for more representation of the BIPOC groups within LHS's student body. In recent years, teachers have been working to include multiple perspectives in the social studies and english curriculum.

African American History Month Display Case Photo Provided by Ms.Strizhak

"We forget how paramount [representation] is. It's probably one of the most important things to me, if not the most important thing we can do, because [representation] is really [what creates] student engagement.," Strizhak said.

In the future, the library is planning to host more collaborations with the social studies and english classes at LHS. The library also encourages any interested students to create their own displays at the library.

Francisco Hernandez Salgado: 2023 RISING STAR recipient

■ Izzi Schulte
Laura Yang
Staff Writers

Lexington High School counselor Fransisco Hernandez Salgado was recognized as the 2023 Rising Star of the Massachusetts School Counselor Association. This prestigious recognition is awarded to a counselor who has shown exceptional dedication and passion towards their profession.

Hernandez, a former high school Spanish teacher and college admissions officer, decided to pursue a career in counseling with the hopes to make an impact on the lives of young people.

"I love talking to students about their future … working with young people and talking to them about who they want to be as human beings beyond the academics," Hernandez said.

Graduation day is one of Hernandez's favorite moments of the school year, where he gets to witness students embark on a new chapter in their lives.

"I think oftentimes in education, whether a teacher or counselor or social worker or whatever else, you don't often get to see the impact that you have on students. But graduation is a very finite thing, and it tells you, 'okay, we met a goal, we reached the goal' in a way," Hernandez said.

As with any profession, there are challenges. Hernandez highlighted the importance of aligning with families regarding their children's future goals.

"At the end of the day, I want my students to be happy and healthy, and I'm 100 percent sure that families want their students to be happy and healthy. I think the difference comes in how we define happy and healthy," Hernandez said. "For some families, it's 'you need to be at this specific school and do the specific major and have this specific career,' whereas, for me, it comes from a different type of privilege of being able to choose what you're called to do and how you're able to contribute to society and do good for other people."

Andrew Stephens, the Lexington High School principal, commended Hernandez on his student-focused approach.

"I'm always struck by, when we're talking about often really weighty issues, how good Francisco is about really centering it back to kids," Stephens said.

When asked about the best qualities of a counselor, Hernandez emphasized the importance of being genuine and honest with students.

"Whether that's being vulnerable, whether that's being reserved, whatever it is, for that person being genuine to who they are is the best thing you can do. Because at the end of the day, for me, I'm a gay man of color, right? … That's all very genuine to me, and I'm very open about it," Hernandez said.

Hernandez gave some words of wisdom for future counselors and educators.

"You might have an idea of wanting to be a counselor or work with kids, or be a teacher, whatever it is, and then you hit obstacles that divert you from that original goal. But you are ultimately going to end up where you need to be. It is wild to think that I was born in this small town in Mexico and now I am literally thousands of miles away and right now being interviewed on an award that I got," Hernandez said.

LHS Students Participate in Annual Spain Trip

Toshio Yuki
Arkesh Kumar
Staff Writers

During February break, Lexington High School juniors and seniors were selected to participate in the annual Spain Trip. The week-long expedition aims to provide Spanish learning students an opportunity to immerse themselves in Spain's language and culture.

The planning for the trip began last April, when prospective students applied for one of 30 limited spots by completing a questionnaire. The Spanish teachers later met to select these students, informing them just before their summer vacation.

"I really like [learning] Spanish—it's one of my favorite classes. Also, it's a travel opportunity to go to Spain with your friends and to practice your Spanish, so I thought all of those sounded really good," Janet Liu, a junior, said.

To plan the agenda for the trip, LHS partnered with an international school called Colegio Delibes. Located in Salamanca, the school helps students learn Spanish and connect them with volunteer host families.

"[Colegio Delibes] does a lot of the work planning the itinerary based on my input in terms of what are the experiences that I want [the] kids to have … that I think are going to be the most fun and the most rewarding," Ryan Casey, an Spanish teacher and trip chaperone, said.

The trip was divided into two sections: during the first half of the week, the students stayed at hotels in Madrid, and in the second half, they stayed at host families' homes in Salamanca. A typical action-packed day featured activities ranging from scavenger hunts to culinary classes.

"We would go to see different things like the museums or the parks… We also did day trips to Toledo, Avila, and Segovia… For the second half of the trip, we were staying with a host family in Salamanca and so we attended four hours of school on those days. Then in the afternoon, we would do some group activities and [get] free time," Elias Tamer, a junior, said.

Most students agreed that the trip was a learning experience that enabled them to use their Spanish skills from school and adapt to unfamiliar surroundings.

" You get to speak with the people that run the stores and that's the opportunity where I got to speak Spanish the most … I really liked small interactions like that," Liu said.

Members of the Spain Exchange.
Photo Provided by Mr. Casey

Memorable experiences like these allowed students to immerse themselves in the authentic Spanish environment.

"As a Spanish teacher, you only see them use their Spanish in the classroom. So it's helpful to actually see what your students do when they're in the Spanish speaking environment [and] having to use the language," Mr. Casey said.

LHS Students Attend Model United Nations Conference in D.C.

Tara Pai
Allison Liu
Staff Writers

On Feb. 16, 13 delegates from Lexington High School's Model United Nations (UN) club traveled to Washington D.C. to participate in the North American Invitational Model United Nations (NAIMUN) Conference.

Model UN is an educational simulation of the United Nations, in which students act as delegates, discussing real-world issues as members of different committees. LHS' Model UN club attends local and national conferences and even hosts its own annual conference, LexMUN.

Students from all around the world attend NAIMUN, a highly-intensive conference hosted by Georgetown University. This year, approximately 3,300 students participated in the conference.

"A huge part of why NAIMUN was so special and so different from every Model UN conference I've done is because people from all over the country came," Mrigank Dhingra, a sophomore, said.

Over the course of four days, students participated in the conference where they discussed topics such as climate change, social minorities, and private military contractors. During their downtime, LHS students explored the city, visiting famous landmarks, and attended lectures by Georgetown professors.

"It felt like there was a lot of freedom in doing what we wanted to do, and that was refreshing," Dhingra said.

Students even became acquainted with many new people through group lunches, socials, dance performances, and other events, such as the Delegate Dance and Hilltop Madness.

"My favorite part was actually getting to meet people from all over the country and actually talking about Model UN … For example, my partner and I went to lunch with people from Chicago and New Jersey for two days just to really discuss what our plan was and what we were going to do to make our solution possible, and I think that was so surreal to me," Dhingra said.

Through discussing Model UN topics, bonding over lunch, sight-seeing, and sharing a common passion, many delegates grew closer to one another.

LexMUN group in Washington.
Photo Provided by the Model UN club

"I definitely got a lot closer to people and my delegation in our club, because although we come in as a unit, we really leave as like a family," Tasneem Ghadiali, a junior and a leader of the Model UN club, said.

Fun Page Crossword

Musket Issue IV

ACROSS

1 acting as a "driving" force, jazz is a ____ for creativity

5 one of Envirothon's four subtopics– relevant to the LHS course, The Science of Water

8 the non-physical challenge of wrestling and many other sports

9 one of Mr. Hernandez's highlights of the year

10 act of extracting from a river done during a pre-nationals trip

DOWN

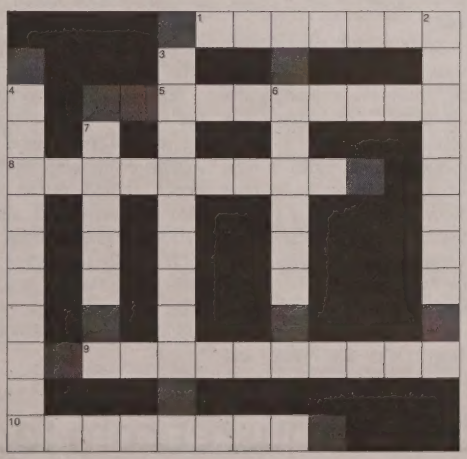
2 type of Grammy Award Feifke received

3 location of the Spain trip host families' homes

4 the Scholastic awards allow for arts and ____ students to earn recognition for their passion and skills

6 as a dancer, Saneiyoshi is both an athlete and an ____

7 Crochet Club nonprofit organization, whose name is a play on words



Lexington Students Shine in Scholastic Competition

Jolene Cai
Nikki Prasad
Staff Writers

Every year, hundreds of thousands of students grades 7-12 compete for regional and national recognition in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Hosted by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, the competition spans a variety of categories on the regional and national level - from flash fiction to painting - allowing students from all artistic backgrounds to compete.

After submitting their work in late Nov. to early Dec., students will receive regional results in late Jan. Works that receive a Gold Key at the regional level qualify for nationals, where the top 1% of all contest submissions will receive a Gold or Silver Medal.

Though highly competitive, Lexington Public School students have found great success in the 2023 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, receiving 168+ regional and 8 national prizes.

Given that Lexington High School students tend to be more STEM-driven, Scholastic awards offer arts and humanities-focused students a platform to showcase their talents.

"The Scholastic Art and Writing competition is a good way LHS students can participate more in [the] liberal arts field," Sally Choi, a sophomore who received two Gold Keys, said.

Choi and other winners highlight the importance of using art to express one's opinions and ideas in their work.

"I explored the topic of balance—in nature, in objects, in life in general. Within it, I created a metaphor for my own life as well; the many aspects of my own self materialized into physical drawings." Amy Feng, a senior who won a Gold Medal for her art piece, said.

To explore one's ideas with a clear vision and artistic skill, however, means that artists and writers must spend a significant amount of time polishing their work.

"Writing is really an act of love--you have to be ok with trying everything, failing, and getting back up again. All that requires lots of time and effort. For me, it took a really long time before I was finally happy with my work," Joanna Liu, a junior who won a Silver Medal in writing, said.

However, it doesn't mean that these artists and writers are alone: friends, family, and mentors are always there to provide feedback and advice. Choi cited the importance of a mentor in her process, especially when she was brainstorming ideas.

"Finding a mentor like an art teacher either inside or outside of school is pretty helpful because you might get lost in the process of submitting and even the direction of the piece," Choi said.

Though challenging, participating in Scholastic is ultimately a rewarding process. By providing a platform for students to explore their passions, explore their skills, and earn recognition for their distinct, creative work, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards encourage people to explore and value the arts and humanities.

"Even if it's something that isn't pursued career-wise, the arts are an integral part of society that everyone should take part in, because it's an outlet for social issues and topics that need to be explored," Feng said.

Crocheting Love: LHS Crochet Club

Angela Tang
Annie Wang
Staff Writers

The Crochet Club provides a relaxing and welcoming atmosphere for students of all skill levels to learn, practice, and share their crochet work with like-minded people. The club meets every Wednesday in room 712 from 3:15 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.

"People come in with their friends and crochet. Some people ask leaders if they get stuck on certain stitches, but most people find what they want to make on YouTube and follow the tutorials," Celine Chang, a club leader, said.

The Crochet Club aims to make crochet accessible to its club members by offering materials, tutorials, and other resources. For one, the Crochet Club allows members to borrow necessary materials through a sheet found on their website. Despite ranging in experience and skill level, students will also frequently assist each other with projects inside and outside of club meetings.

"Crochet club is a community filled with people of lots of different skill levels. We have some people who have been doing it for years, and some people who have never done it before. It's really just a great group of people who enjoy each other's company and help each other out," Abbie Schwartz, a club leader, said.

Beyond its community, Crochet Club also provides ample, crochet-related volunteer opportunities. They are an avid supporter of Project Linus, a non-profit organization that provides handmade blankets to children who are ill, traumatized, or in need of warmth and comfort.

The club has contributed to Knots of Love, where volunteers crochet beanies for NICU babies and those experiencing treatment-induced hair loss, as well as the Red Scarf Project, which sends handmade red scarves in their Valentine's Day care packages.

Although the crochet club helps people find volunteer experiences, it is not a requirement. Crocheting is also enjoyable as a hobby.

Whether students are looking to engage in community service or practice their skills, the club's ambient atmosphere and friendly community provide students with an excellent low-commitment opportunity to hone their crochet abilities or serve others.

"Life is already so stressful, and people need a place to just decompress. Crochet club isn't competitive…it's here as a safe space for students to learn or practice a skill, an artistic outlet, and to just enjoy company without pressure," Schwartz said.

Students learn how to crochet.
Photo by Daniel Kim

LexArt Annual Regional High School Show

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Each year, the LexArt gallery and art show hosts an exhibition showcasing artwork from high schools in the region. The gallery is open until April 2 at 130 Waltham Street and features art pieces from students in Lexington, Bedford, Winchester, Waltham, and Burlington.

"It's been a wonderful tradition [that's happened] for many years. [It's made up] of all the surrounding towns around Lexington and [is] showcasing the best of artists," Alethea Roy, the K-12 Coordinator of Visual Arts for Lexington Public Schools, said.

Teachers and students dedicate a significant amount of time towards creating the art gallery. Throughout the course of the year, students create artwork which is then handpicked by teachers for the show. While choosing pieces, teachers aim to represent a diverse range of art forms, from digital art to sculpture to visual media.

"At the start of the school year, we're all aware and keeping our eyes open for something unique," Jessica Sperandio, an art teacher at Lexington High School, said. "The artwork that I pick has come from a variety of projects."

Teacher-student collaboration is vital for the success of the yearly display. Today, it is a staple of the LHS art experience, as both parties work hard to create and display LHS's best visual works.

"It's really the sort of moment where teachers are honoring their students, work, and achievements," Roy said.

LHS student showcase at LexArt
Photo by Vikram Anantha

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STEM Spotlight: Jaime Yu

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Ryan Qin
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Lexington High School senior Jaime Yu will graduate this year after demonstrating a strong passion for earth sciences in both his academic studies and extracurricular activities.

Yu first became interested in earth sciences during the pandemic, when he started studying and participating in the National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB). NOSB was created to address the gap in the environment and earth sciences in public education.

"I started studying—that's how I got into physical oceanography, chemical oceanography, and geological oceanography. In my 10th grade year, when COVID-19 happened, I spent a lot of my time studying. I read probably a chapter of a textbook every two days. I just learned so much, and I had so much fun doing it, so I played a pretty big role in NOSB starting from that year," Yu said.

Since then, Yu has been affiliated with numerous earth science extracurriculars including Science Olympiad, NOSB, and Envirothon at LHS.

"I was a part of the International Earth Science Olympiad for the 2021 season and ever since then, I've served as a mentor and advisor for the team. And this year, I will be [their] counselor in Oklahoma," Yu said.

Out of all of Yu's competitive experiences, he believes that the most important takeaway was learning how to be a leader and build a strong community.

"I think it's so important to build a good community where everybody feels heard and everybody's willing to speak up. And more importantly, everybody laughs together and has fun together... Being a leader isn't necessarily about being the strongest or the most disciplined or being able to tell others what to do, but instead it's about being able to give everybody a good time and make people happy," Yu said.

Yu's curiosity for the world around him is what drew him to the STEM field, and is what will remain with him after graduating from LHS.

"I think that my goal would be to be in a place where I could just give a lot of ideas and flush them all out and try them and see what sticks, see what doesn't. And just try the things that people are afraid to try," Yu said.

For students looking to get involved in earth sciences, Yu advises them to stick with it despite its difficulties.

"I think in earth science, you have to get over that initial little hump of, 'this stuff I'm learning is so boring,' into, 'this stuff I'm learning is so cool.' So if you're interested in it at all, I encourage you to stick with it past that initial little bump and see if you really do like it," Yu said.

Jaime Yu in front of the Science building
Photo by Sujin Lee

LHS's Coding Curriculum

Ryan Asarpour
Siya Setty
Staff Writers

For decades, Lexington High School has been offering computer science classes that span various programming languages, concepts, and levels. These courses teach students critical thinking skills and discuss the real world applications of the math lessons taught at school.

One way these classes help students develop critical problem solving skills is by implementing a project-based curriculum, which allows students to explore and develop skills at their own pace.

"We always say that our courses are project based in a lot of ways. The idea is that we introduce a topic, but then we let the students explore and be creative with those," Michaela Tracy, an Intermediate Python teacher, said.

As course difficulty progresses from College Preparatory (CP) to Advanced Placement (AP), students are offered more independence in class and at home.

"I think as you take coding classes over the years, it helps you learn the very important skill of being resourceful and self learning," Jessica Dai, a senior, said.

Computer science at LHS includes several languages such as Python and C++. These languages are taught as a prerequisite for AP courses and give students an introduction to the skills needed for more advanced programming.

"Our [introductory] programming courses really are introducing students to the fundamentals of actually programming and learning a language. So we're really a place where students can come with some experience or no experience and get something out of the course," Tracy said.

In addition to the introductory courses, LHS offers two AP computer science courses: AP Computer Science Principles and AP Computer Science A.

"AP Computer Science A is strictly a programming course. It's just looking at Java, first principles to advanced concepts in a single language. [AP Computer Science] Principles is more about looking at programming- the entire field in general," Tracy said.

Teachers like Tracy aim to make the transition between introductory programming courses and AP courses as smooth as possible by assigning engaging projects, instilling students with a curiosity for coding.

"The programs are generally pretty fun. I remember, one was about like gnomes or dwarfs - just like some simple things that test your ability to use algorithms and do coding logic," Dai said.

As she progressed through the computer science courses, Dai said that she found the class environment to be supportive and the students were more excited to learn coding.

Teachers believe that taking a computer science course can be beneficial because students can use the skills they acquire in various fields in high school and beyond.

"Coding just appears in a lot of fields now that might not have existed before. I think about a lot of computational biology, physics, math, applied math... being able to have those experiences in high school is just going to make a huge difference in the long run for our students," Tracy said.

A Look Into LHS's Envirothon Team

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Katie Lin
Staff Writers

Lexington High School's Envirothon club is taking a unique approach to solve environmental issues by intersecting the fields of science, politics, and economics.

Envirothon has existed at LHS for many years, but has recently seen a rise in popularity due to its unique structure and consistent win at nationals.

"Traditionally [Envirothon] was small and underfunded. I think for many years it didn't have too many members, which was challenging for tryouts and for making teams," Eileen Ho, a club member, said.

Envirothon offers a wide range of learning opportunities. There are traditional lectures, which fall under four subtopics: forestry, aquatics, wildlife, and soils. Additionally, the club offers field trip opportunities, where members apply their environmental science skills to the real world.

"We do a bunch of fun trips in Envirothon. One of them was before nationals, [where] we were able to do sampling from a river...After all those lectures and lessons where I was just studying off of my computer or taking notes, I think finally having it materialize into something physical was the best experience for me," Ho said.

In addition to hands-on projects, the club competes at the state and national level, where there is a designated topic each year.

"[The current issue] this year is climate change. There are three main parts: what is climate change, what factors are causing it, what effects does it have and what the community is already doing, and a solution you propose to mitigate or adapt to climate change here," Caroline Ehmann, a co-captain, said.

In the last part of the competition, members step into the shoes of environmentalists—an unconventional practice in the realm of STEM competitions, often dominated by buzzers and tests. This is one of the key ways Envirothon attracts new members, as this format strays from the competitive environment of STEM at LHS.

"Something about Envirothon that I like is that it has less of that competitive, toxic atmosphere that you see at a lot of other clubs. In middle school, I went to a lot of clubs that were quite competitive and had a lot of pressure, and Envirothon took that off a little bit and really created that community aspect," Ho said.

Through presentations, interviewing community members, and hands-on experiences, members of Envirothon hope they can make a lasting impact on their community.

"I hope that we can make some sort of lasting impact... [by] helping pass a bylaw or lobbying somebody, or even just making the problems and solutions more well-known and widespread through education. I feel like climate change and other environmental issues seem so big, and being in a group that can actually do something about it is really cool and makes you feel like you're doing something important," Ehmann said.

Breaking Boundaries, Dancer Seiya Saneyoshi

Allison Ma
Nora Kapoor
Staff Writers

After watching a production of The Nutcracker at four years old, Seiya Saneyoshi, a senior at Lexington High School, asked his father to sign him up for ballet classes. When Saneyoshi moved to Massachusetts, he enrolled at the Boston Ballet School (BBS), where he currently dances.

Dancers are frequently associated with femininity, and male dancers often feel the effects of these stereotypes and gender expectations. Saneyoshi believes there are both benefits and drawbacks to being a male dancer.

"It's a lot easier for me to get into all the selective programs because there are few boys doing ballet, but at the same time, there's also less attention because when you're in a room full of girls doing ballet, there's less time to focus on you and the individual steps you have to do," Saneyoshi said.

During the pandemic, students at BBS didn't have many opportunities for live performances. However, transitioning out of the pandemic, BBS organized a production of Peter Pan, where Saneyoshi was cast as Peter Pan.

"Just being able to get back on stage, and feel the audience, feel the lights, feel everyone else around you, gave me a lot of energy and it felt like things were starting to go back to normal," Saneyoshi said.

Saneyoshi believes that ballet goes beyond athleticism and technique, as much of the beauty behind ballet relies on the dancer's deliberate movement and expressions.

"You have to point your feet, stretch your legs, and do all these exercises every day. But what really makes you an artist is the intention that you put behind the steps, and drawing from your real life, daily life, emotions, to make the steps really mean something," Saneyoshi said.

Saneyoshi also acknowledged that there are challenges that come with being a dancer. Because ballet is an intensive time commitment, Saneyoshi has to balance ballet with his other commitments carefully.

"It's definitely a challenge; coming home really tired and having a huge amount of homework is not always easy. [This is] also [true with] balancing school friends and dance friends. I don't get a lot of time to spend with my school friends outside of school," Saneyoshi said.

Seiya Saneyoshi dancing outside.
Photo Provided by Seiya Saneyoshi

Despite these difficulties, Saneyoshi advises other dancers not to give up.

"When I was younger, I found it really, really boring. Just doing a bunch of exercises, not really playing characters yet, that can get really tiring and monotonous, but just like anything, whether it be playing an instrument, or doing school, once you develop a foundation, the possibilities are really endless," Saneyoshi said.

LHS Fencing State Meet

Erin Suh
Staff Writer

This year, Lexington High School's Fencing Team competed in the Massachusetts State Meet, held on Feb. 26 at the Boston Fencing Club in Allston.

Despite being a student-led club, the team has consistently performed well at annual state meets.

"In the past couple of years, the boys have won the overall state championship, and we have taken home a lot of medals," Mira Nayak, a senior, said.

The team practiced at the Boston Fencing Club once a week to prepare for the meet. Last year, the team held practices at the Lexington Community Center, but could not do so this year, making it difficult for new members to learn the sport.

"The [veterans] of the sport taught new people, which was really cool. Just introducing the sport to them and explaining things, that was new this year. It's hard to explain the sport without being able to do the sport, so I think [the transition to BFC] was really helpful for people who were new to the team, and I think we're going to continue to do that in future years," Nayak said.

The fencing team was created a few years ago as a passion project by talented fencers with the goal of introducing the sport to more people. The club maintains a friendly atmosphere for all of its members.

"I think that because competitive fencing is very competitive, the environment can be a lot more toxic. But I think one of the things I loved about the team is that there were some people who didn't know how to fence, [so] it's a place where you don't have to be so competitive. I enjoy the school team a lot more and it's probably one of the reasons why I continue to fence competitively on the team," Nayak said.

Fencing meets are not only an opportunity for the fencers to compete and demonstrate the skills they have attained, but they are also time for team bonding.

"In the competitions that we go to as a team, there's a lot of time in between matches. There's so many things that we do together to pass that time, whether it's playing games, telling jokes, talking about school, things like that," Ramaiza Sohail, a sophomore, said.

The inclusiveness of the club extends beyond its weekly practices. All members of the club are welcome to compete in the annual state meet, regardless of their skill level.

In the absence of pressure and rivalry, the team's connections have grown deep.

"While your friends are doing matches, there's a lot of cheering, yelling, and just lots of support coming from both sides, so it's always fun to see who can be the loudest," Sohail said.

LHS Fencing Team at a meet.
Photo Provided by LHS Fencing Team

To students who may feel hesitant to join, Yipeng Sha, a senior, suggests not being discouraged by other athletes' capabilities.

"Don't feel intimidated by other people's skills or whatever barrier you think there might be. Just show up, and we'll help you out. It's a really cool sport, and I feel like not enough people appreciate it. It's a really great world to get into," Sha said.

LHS Wrestling Team Wraps Up a Strong Season

Nolan An
Atreya Mallanna
Staff Writers

The 2023 Lexington High School wrestling season was filled with intense practices and countless tournaments. Because the team was almost entirely composed of underclassmen, the team worked to develop the discipline required to succeed in wrestling amid their busy schedules.

Justin Demers, the head coach of the LHS wrestling team, emphasized the rigor behind the sport.

"Wrestling is the hardest workout and the hardest thing that most people do in their lives, especially physically, but it also contains some mental struggle because of what you go through on a daily basis," Demers said.

While practices are crucial to the success of a wrestler, Demers highlights the importance of the off-season.

"In wrestling, we say champions are made in the off-season. So it's really living a lifestyle that encourages hard work," Demers said.

Dillon Noonan, a sophomore varsity starter, has taken this advice to heart.

"During the off season, I continue to wrestle by participating in a club wrestling team as well as attending open mats. I also lift weights during the off season in order to be stronger than my opponents," Noonan said.

Wrestling is a sport that requires not only technical and physical prowess, but also a strong mentality.

"What I tell them all the time is that your mind breaks before your body, so it's getting past that point. It really helps them whether it's in the job market later, in life, or academically as they keep on doing more intensive classes," Demers said.

Noonan agreed with Coach Demers' point.

"The most important thing I have learned through wrestling is that the way you approach a situation mentally can determine the outcome before it even starts," Noonan said.

The coaches hope to foster important values and teamwork abilities, skills that will serve the wrestling team even after high school.

"It's the hard work that we put in and translating that to the accountability of yourself and to that of your teammates outside of it. So pushing that into the next steps of your life, even if it's something as simple as emailing if you're missing something, taking the individual step to push yourself farther and do more work to obtain your goals," Demers said.

Overall, this year has been a building block for the wrestling team, and they aspire to reach even greater heights in the upcoming years.

"The more work you put into this sport, the more you get out of it, much like any occupation, or anything you do, the more you try and train yourself for it, the better you do and that's the direct correlation," Demers said.